

P A I N T A L

The veteran COMEDIAN



THE toughest job for any actor is to make others laugh. And yet, there's one actor who has done just that for more than three decades. Paintal, the name everyone knows him by, acted in more than 400 films, portraying different roles and characters in a career spanning 34 years. A down-to-earth man, Paintal is a dedicated actor and comedian.

At the age of 19, Paintal migrated to Pune from Delhi to make it in films. Followed two long years of struggle. Walking to studios, foregoing lunch, no money for bus fare and eating just *vada-pav* when the hunger pangs got unbearable. He confesses, "Thirty-four years have gone by. 'Trust me, I am a very happy and content man today,' he smiles.

Paintal had to struggle for years before he got his first break in *Umang*. He wasn't noticed in this minuscule role in his first film. Then *Mere Apne* happened. Vinod Khanna, Danny, Shatrughan Sinha and Paintal made their presence felt in this film directed by Gulzar. The film was a surprise hit. The best part of *Mere Apne* according to Paintal is that he made three friends and they had a great time making the film. "Even today when we meet it's like old times," he confesses. After *Mere Apne*, Paintal has never looked back. "Every comedian is great in his or her own way. It's the uniqueness in an individual that sets them apart," he points out. Ask him who is the greatest of them all and he says, "Every actor who has made you laugh over the years is great. It's the most difficult art and considering all of us have succeeded, it reflects that we all had different styles. So you see, every comedian is great in his own way." From Bhagwan Dada to Agha, Mukri to Mehmood, Kishore Kumar to Asit Sen, Dhumal to Johnny Walker, Kesto Mukherjee to Johnny Lever. Paintal doesn't single anyone out. He explains, "We comedians have a divinity in us. We make people laugh and relieve their tensions. Help them forget their worries. God has given us this art that's truly divine!"



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Comedy today though, he admits has changed. "Earlier, we had special scriptwriters who used to weave words for the comedian who was the most important part of the story. There used to be soul in our character. Today, comedians are inserted into the films just for a few laughs," he laments. Commenting on the comedy track in movies of today, he says, "Earlier, a movie used to take years to complete. Makers wanted to give the audience entertainment with a moral message. Storywriters, producers and directors used to make films from the heart and execute them with their mind. The commercial aspect was a part and parcel of the business. No one bothered with the outcome. Even though the population was almost 20 per cent of what it is today, each hit movie used to run for 25, 50 or 75 weeks uninterrupted at a single theatre in three regular shows. Today, if a movie completes 50 or 100 days, it's party time. The difference is there for you to judge. The commercial aspect is the main agenda today, as filmmaking has become the most lucrative business. There's no soul left in our films."

Till the '80s, the comedian had a strong presence in the films. The art of comedy took on a different turn when heroes like Shashi Kapoor, Dharmendra, Amitabh Bachchan, Mithun Chakravarty and Sanjeev Kumar took on the role of the funster. The scriptwriters were only too happy to write comedy tracks for stars. The audience welcomed the stars in the new *avatar* with open arms. And many comedians were out of work. But, with the entry of new scriptwriters, comedians were back. "Comedians like Johny Lever have made a niche in this field. Today from 1 to 10, it is Johny Lever. He is not only gifted, but also a wonderful person. He has really struggled to reach the pinnacle," Paintal raves. Paintal has fond memories of *Rafoo Chakkar* in which he and Rishi Kapoor disguised themselves as girls. "I really enjoyed doing that film. Even Neetu Singh vibed so well with us that for days Rishi and I felt like real girls. I just loved *Rafoo Chakkar*." Another movie which has a special place in his heart is *Satte Pe Satta*. "It was a laugh riot. Everybody portrayed his role to perfection. It was fun!" Today, Paintal is content with television. He is busy with various serials and telefilms.

Paintal's son Hiten is all set to make his film debut with *Tere Liye*. The father believes in the old principle of struggling and making on your own, "I learnt the hard way. I want Hiten to go through the same struggle, so that he can value his success and learn from his failure. He is a talented boy and I'm not saying that because he's my son. He's proved himself in the TV serial *Yeh Hai Mere Apne*. His debut film will definitely make waves. He's hardworking and dedicated. He has grown up in the film industry and he knows exactly what he wants," Paintal says confidently.

Paintal has worked with the finest directors like Hrishikesh Mukherji, Raj Khosla and Narendra Bedi. "It is a great feeling working with great directors," he beams.

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